



Pat Hutchens/TC

Jane Halton, a former finance department secretary and an adjunct professor, appeared at cabinet's expenditure review committee over nearly 30 years. Halton describes the inner workings of the federal budget in what's known as "the razor gang".

The razor gang, comprised of the treasurer, the finance minister and then a couple of senior ministers, scrutinises the government's spending and savings in the budget process, Halton says.

"They would scrutinise – and sometimes it's seen as interrogate – the ministers who bring forward proposals, things that they would like to do. And they will either agree with them or ask for more information or say 'no, we're not doing that'. And they do exactly the same with savings proposals as well."

In the process, if a minister wants to bring a spending measure forward, they also have to propose a savings measure. Whether or not it gets through depends a little bit on personality and a bit on the circumstances, Halton says.

As to the upcoming federal budget, Halton says things are a "little tight".

"We know there's very little wages growth and there will however I expect, be slightly more revenue than they were expecting."

This podcast is co-published with the University of Canberra's [Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis](#)

Politics podcast: Jane Halton on how to make a federal budget

Written by The Conversation

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

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